

**EXPLORING THE REPRESENTATION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN
COMMERCIAL ADVERTISEMENTS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Rabia Rashid¹, Maryyam Jabeen², Tanveer Akhtar^{3*}, Samina Ilyas⁴

1Department of English, University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, Pakistan. Email:

rabiarasheed589@gmail.com

2. Department of English, University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, Pakistan. Email:

jabeenm666@gmail.com

3. Department of English, University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, Pakistan. Email:

tanveerakhtar@uosahiwal.edu.pk

4. Department of English, University of Sahiwal, Sahiwal, Pakistan. Email:

saminaillyas@uosahiwal.edu.pk

*Corresponding author: Dr. Tanveer Akhtar, Department of English, University of Sahiwal, email: tanveerakhtar@uosahiwal.edu.pk

Abstract

This study focuses on the gender stereotypes shown in TV advertisements. This research examines the language and visuals in these advertisements that influence customers. This research analyzes persuasive language used in these advertisements and how they visualize gender stereotypes using different colors, signs, gestures, and postures. For visual and linguistics analyses this study used Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis and Fairclough's (2001) critical discourse analysis accordingly. These advertisements show the fundamental differences in the way men and women are portrayed. Different cultural and social factors are used to represent gender stereotypes. Women are portrayed with physical attractiveness or beautiful female body and doing household duties. At the same time, men are portrayed as independent and emotionally strong doing outdoor duties. So, the persuasive language in advertisements is used to control people's minds.

Keywords: gender stereotype, traditional gender roles, TV advertisements, critical discourse analysis, multimodal analysis, gender representation.

Introduction:

TV advertisements serve as a potent medium to influence people's perceptions and attract customers. These advertisers, through their advertisements, project various gender stereotypes. They often portray women with attractive physical appearances to captivate customers (Jabeen & Afzal, 2023; Imran, 2023). Moreover, they employ persuasive language to alter people's perspectives and influence their thoughts. Celebrities and models are frequently used to grab the attention of customers. These advertisements, through their strategic use of language and visuals, subtly but effectively influence customers. As Cook (2001) points out, advertisements not only attract people but also have the power to shape their thoughts and opinions. Thus, these advertisements play a pivotal role in shaping and transforming our society.

According to Zawisza (2019), advertisements have a greater impact on creating an idealized image of the world. They affect people's minds and change their opinions. Advertisers manipulate people by representing female beauty. Iram (2023) contains a study about women's representation in the Pakistani advertising industry, and the data has been analyzed using semiotic analysis. Advertisers use symbols and pictures along with the text, which helps them grab customers' attention.

Saeed and Khan (2022) have carried out their study in "Critical Discourse Analysis of Language and Visuals in Beauty Advertisements." their findings show that the use of language has a greater impact on shaping the ideology. Ledin and Machin (2020) describe the link between multimodality and CDA, the clear idea of multimodality employed as a part of CDA. At the same time, CDA focuses on the hidden discourse in the text and reveals the power relations and ideologies.

Gender stereotypes are often called social stereotypes because our society is one of the major factors that make gender-based roles. There is the societal notion of masculinity and femininity, about their roles, how men and women should, and how they must be in and outside the home. Moreover, our society plays a role in dividing gender-based characteristics concerning physical, psychological, and behavioral. The beauty of women is another stereotype; therefore, females are judged by their physical appearance instead of their abilities. On the other hand, one is called a real man based on job, money, and strength.

According to Butler (1993), individuals perform gender "through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices. The study of gender stereotypes in advertising shapes the traditional roles and expectations regarding gender in our society. Human differentiation based on gender is a fundamental phenomenon. Gender can be defined by the sex roles they perform in society. Moreover, the traditional roles of males and females are different and developed in their childhood. According to (Smith, 1985), the behavior of both genders differentiated in their childhood. This gender differentiation is formulated by our society and environment. Both males and females have to play their specified duties. These gender stereotypes have specified feminine gender roles as household, caretakers, and emotionally weak, whereas the masculine gender roles dictate that men are strong, physically powerful, and emotionally strong.

Research objectives:

- To analyze the linguistic and visual strategies used in TV advertisements that construct stereotypical gender roles.
- To study the discourse in TV advertisements generating stereotypical gender roles.

Research Questions:

1. How do Pakistani TV advertisements construct stereotypical gender roles using linguistic and visual strategies?
2. How do Pakistani TV advertisements portray the stereotypical gender roles for both men and women?

Literature Review:

Gender stereotypes in the mass media, like advertisements, have a powerful impact and a huge number of audiences. Media provide entertainment to people and play a crucial role in shaping their opinions and affecting their lives and beliefs. (McLuhan 1964). Men and women in television advertisements are portrayed following traditional gender stereotypes (Furnha, Mak 1999). Media is one of the platforms that have a great influence on the differentiated roles of males and females. Men have been perceived as dominant and head, while women often occupy the role of housewives and caretakers. Moreover, women are prescribed as objects of beauty and shown in advertisements to gain more audience. In comparison, men are depicted as decision-makers and financial planners (Iqbal & Nadeem, 2023). Kumar (2004) states that advertising influences and controls the targeted group and promotes their products by using different activities. According to Fairclough (2001), critical discourse analysis examines the spoken, written, and printed text as well as the gestures and postures in the text. Also, it helps in exploring the hidden meaning in the text. According to Lukes (1986) and Wrong (1979), power is exercised through discourse in different societies and groups, and power is practiced through the use of language.

According to Chauhan (2006), advertisements attract people, and they buy the advertised products. The stereotypes idealized the image of beauty by using females and power and dominance by males. There has been considerable interest in the possible contributions of the mass media to the origins and maintenance of gender roles (Courtney & Whipple, 1974). The stereotypes in TV advertisements reflect the difference between men and women. Mills (2003) states, "It is assumed that context consists of background assumptions, shared conventions, and variables such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, and so on." Machin (2007) describes denotation and connotation representations. Denotations only describe the specific events in the image, while connotations describe and explain the concepts in the image. According to Barthes (1997), symbols and icons also explain specific concepts or ideas in communication.

According to Imran et al. (2020), TV advertisements use men as authoritative and strong advertisements, while women are portrayed as beautiful and emotional. This research is held to describe these types of gender stereotypes in Pakistani society by using critical discourse analysis. According to Price (1998), semiology is the study of signs, words, and gestures and their meanings. Machin and Mayr (2012) describe that no neutral language exists as there are hidden concepts behind it. Furthermore, Lee (1992) states that language is an instrument for the assignment of the phenomena of human experience to conceptual categories. It is not simply a

mirror that reflects reality. Rather, it functions to impose structure on our perceptions. In a recent study, Daha's (2022) research on women's objectification in television advertisements highlights its negative effects on young female viewers, particularly through the lens of objectification theory. A study conducted among 306 female university students in Sahiwal, Pakistan, explored how these portrayals contribute to mental health risks. The data, collected via questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS and AMOS, revealed that objectification leads to body shame and psychological harm. Regression and correlation tests demonstrated that body shame acts as a mediator, influencing both the objectification and its mental health effects. These findings underscore the significant role media plays in shaping negative body image and mental health issues among young women.

Research Methodology:

The sample selected for this research paper is four Pakistani TV advertisements that show traditional gender roles. All these advertisements are available on the Internet. We have selected these advertisements randomly. These advertisements show different societal roles for both men and women. Men are allocated outdoor duties, and women are bound to do household duties. Following are the advertisement samples that are selected:

1. Habib Cooking Oil
2. TRESemme Shampoo
3. Pakistan's Global Tyre brand
4. Toyota Cars

Theoretical Framework:

This research examines advertisements using Fairclough's (2001) critical discourse analysis and Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis. It observes how discourse is used in different texts and situations and describes the relationship between text and societal values. However, Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis examines visuals like gestures, signs, and postures. Every picture has hidden meanings, and this research observed these hidden meanings in the pictures' color, poses, and signs. By using the advertisements, we describe the gender stereotype and the discourse that is used to construct traditional roles by manipulating people's minds. Goffman's (1976) view is that “the gender is accomplished in print advertisements through the display of postures that both ritualize women subordination and conventionally associated with their gender, such as the “bashful knee bend,” receiving help and instruction, and smiling more frequently than men.”

Data Collection

Data is collected from the internet for this study and these advertisements are downloaded freely. These advertisements are selected randomly and show traditional gender roles. Advertisements on beauty products to household duties have women and others empowered and authoritative advertisements like cars and businesses use men. So, this research used Fairclough's (2001) critical discourse analysis and Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis to examine the linguistic and visual discourse. It focuses on how advertisers used flowery language and signs, gestures, colors, and postures to attract people and create a stereotypical mindset by visualizing traditional gender roles.

Data Analysis:

This research analyzes the data using Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional framework, which contains textual, discourse, and social analysis. It also observes semiotics like signs, poses, and color using Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis.

Visual Analysis:

This research uses Machin's (2007) multimodal analysis for visual analysis. It discusses the signs, colors, and postures.

Visual analysis of Figure 1: Habib cooking oil

In this advertisement, celebrity Nimra Khan is using Habib cooking oil, which shows the gender stereotype in our society. Tasks like cooking are associated with women.



Figure 1: Habib cooking oil

In this picture, she is smiling, which portrays patriarchal values and conveys a meaningful message to the audience. Women are supposed to be more emotional, weak, and beautiful. This shows our traditional values, which are made by our society, that women have to cook for the whole family. It connotes that household responsibilities are affiliated with women. Different colors in this picture also portray hidden meanings.

The pink color she is wearing makes her soft and glamorous. Pink is thought of as the color of women. Other colors in the picture make it attractive and catch the attention of the audience. The company's name and slogan are written in red, making it more attractive. Here, the use of sharp colors in the picture and model are well fit in the frame to fulfill the aim of advertisers.

Visual analysis of Figure 2: TRESemme Shampoo

In this advertisement, the celebrity Kubra Khan is shown using the shampoo. This picture portrays gender stereotypes, like long and beautiful hair, leading to greater social acceptance. Beauty is a scale for women to accept themselves in society.



Figure 2: TRESemme shampoo

In this picture, the use of dark colors makes it more visible and prominent. The contrast of black and golden color makes this picture bolder and sharper. The posture of the actress shows the length of her hair. The actress's gaze is directly towards the audience, and it seems that she is conveying a message. The purpose of using sharp colors is to attract the audience.

Visual analysis of Figure 3: Pakistan's Global Tyre Brand

In this advertisement, a famous Turkish actor, Burak Özçivit, says it is a game changer to service Tyres, a Pakistani brand. This picture shows traditional gender roles like male dominance or dominance. Our societal values bound males to breadwinners and decision makers or to hold the outdoor matters.



Figure 3: Pakistan's global Tyre brand

Visual analysis of Figure 4: Toyota cars

In this advertisement, males are shown advertising a famous car company. This picture portrays the real image of the gender stereotype that males are authoritative and decision-makers. Traditional gender roles define males in occupational settings. Our society sets a scale that a man is a "real man" if he has a branded car and other things.

The white background makes it more visible and attractive. The slogan written in black and red catches the attention of more viewers. The postures and gestures of these males also convey direct meaning to the audience, which fulfills the purpose of advertisers.



Figure 4: Toyota car

Linguistics Analysis:

This research analyzes it linguistically using Fairclough's (2001) model. It describes the text, discourse, and social practices.

Persuasive Language:

Advertisers use persuasive language to attract and influence people to buy their products. Somehow, they use imperatives to attract customers. They make a friendly bond with customers by using imperatives while advertising their products. Some of the imperatives used in these commercials are the following:

Please treat them with Tresemme [TRESemme shampoo]

“Ab bahana nahi gari chalay gi” (Toyota car) also used some imperatives to influence the costumers. “No more excuses; **drive** the car.” Here, driving the car is imperative.

“Dil se pakaen, dilon ko manaen” [Habib cooking oil]. In this advertisement, the imperative sentences are: “**Cook** with your heart, **win** the heart.”

Vocabulary:

Vocabulary is a tool used to make ideologies and social values. The vocabulary used in the advertisements has positive and negative adjectives. Positive adjectives describe the product's positive qualities and change people's mindset. Also, these adjectives influence people's emotions, feelings, and desires and create fantasy in their minds. Negative adjectives that are used in these advertisements are problems and excuses (Bahana). Positive adjectives that are used in these advertisements are treat them, game changer, and win hearts (dilon ko manaen).

Slogans:

The advertisers use multiple slogans. The major purpose of using slogans is that they are easy to remember and remain over a long time in memory. In all the household, childcare, and beauty products females are portrayed by using persuasive language. This is how they impact people's minds set by false images of beauty and influence their minds and behavior. While men are portrayed as strong, lack of emotions, and providers of the home.

Slogans that are used in these advertisements are:

“Kyun ka ye hai dil ka maamla (because this is a matter of the heart)” [Habib cooking oil]

“Saloon smooth baal ghar pay (get straight and smooth hair at home)” [TRESemme]

“It's a game changer” [Pakistan's global Tyre brand]

“Ab bahana nahi, gari chalay gi” (no excuse, drive the car)” [Toyota car]

Discourse analysis:

By using discourse analysis, this research examines the language that is used beyond the sentence level. There are different strategies used to analyze the discourse in these advertisements. In these advertisements, celebrities like Burak Özçivit, Kubra Khan, and Nimra Khan are shown. Also, puffery words are used to attract more audience, for example, “exchange with ease” (Toyota car), “it is a game changer” (Pakistan's global Tyre brand), and " dilon ko manaen" (habib cooking oil. Besides these also, some emotive words are used, like "it is a promise" (Toyota car) and “treat them with” (TRESemme shampoo).

Beauty and household advertisements target women by using persuasive language and changing their beliefs. These advertisements idealize the image of beauty and traditional gender roles. They present women doing childcare and home responsibilities and admiring beauty. Celebrities are used to convince the audience to buy their products. The use of flowery and embellished language maximizes the quality of the product.

Social Analysis:

Social analysis aims to explore the background knowledge of the text within society. This research shows the stereotypical image of women's beauty and male authority in society through TV advertisements. Women are treated based on fair color and household responsibilities instead of their abilities, education, and intelligence. On the other side, men are treated based on financial status, and a man is called a "real man" if he has a car, a well-furnished home, and his children get an education in a well-known school. TV advertisements are constructing these gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. By using persuasive language, they control the minds of people and exercise their power. In our society, women are treated based on physical appearance (Riji, 2006). Nowadays, women want to look more attractive, so they get easily manipulated by these commercials. It's a traditional portrayal of women as a homemaker, so these types of commercials easily manipulate females' minds, and they associate themselves with household duties. However, the male image in advertising is shown as a breadwinner so they are associated as socially able. These social practices make gender differences or set traditional gender roles.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research used various visual and language analyses, including signs, gestures, postures, color, vocabulary, and slogans with emotive words to attract people. Advertisers use beautiful celebrities to influence people. Females are portrayed as idealized images of beauty while men as strong and dominant. The ideology of power is also examined in this research by using celebrities. They use language as a powerful tool to influence and attract customers. They also discuss the problems with the solution that is their product. This is how they manipulate people's mind and their opinion.

References

- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image-Music-Text*. London: Fontana.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge
- Cook, G. (2001). *Discourse of advertising*, New York: Routledge.
- Chauhan, S.G. (2006). Advertising Language: The Psychology Behind Advertising Messages. *Language in India* (Vol. 6). <http://www.languageinindia.com/june2006/chauhan.html>
- Courtney, A.E. & Whipple, T.W. (1974). Women in TV Commercials. *Journal of Communication*, pp. 24, 110–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00375.x>
- Daha, M. (2020). The Behavior of Viewers towards Women Objectification in Television Advertisements: A Case Study. *International Review of Literary Studies*, 2(2), 43–55.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power*. (2nd edition). London: Routledge.

- Furnham, A., Mak, T. (1999). Sex-Role Stereotyping in Television Commercials: A Review and Comparison of Fourteen Studies Done on Five Continents Over 25 Years. *Sex Roles* 41, 413–437. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1018826900972>
- Goffman, E. (1976). Gender Advertisements. 24–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16079-2>
- Iqbal, S., & Nadeem, R. (2023). Revisiting Gender Roles: A Feministic Analysis of Pakistani movie “Bol”. *International Review of Literary Studies*, 5(2), 1-7.
- Imran, M. (2023). Media in Asia: Global, Digital, Gendered and Mobile: edited by Youna Kim, Abingdon. Quarterly Review of Film and Video, 41(6), 752–755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2023.2171204>
- Imran, M., Afzaal, M., Akhtar, S., & Ahmad, S. (2020). Gender equality and the quota provisions: a sustainable development in Women’s participation in Politics in Pakistan. *Dilemas Contemporáneos: Educación, Política y Valores*, 7(2).
- Iram, A., Bukhari, S. H. Z., & Abbas, Z. (2023). Portrayal of women in the advertising industry of Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*. 5(2), 216-225. <https://doi.org/10.52567/pjsr.v5i02.1184>
- Jabeen, M., & Afzal, F. (2023). Manifestation of Gender Differences in Pakistani Society: A Critical Study of Women’s Writings. *International Review of Literary Studies*, 5(1), 31-38.
- Kumar, P. (2004). Concept of Beauty in India. *International Journal of Cosmetic Surgery and Aesthetic Dermatology*, 4(4), 261–264. DOI:[10.1089/153082002763471902](https://doi.org/10.1089/153082002763471902)
- Lee, D. (1992). *Competing Discourses: Perspective and Ideology in Language*. (1ST edition). London: Longman.
- Lukes, S. (1986). *Power: A radical view*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ledin, P. & Machin, D. (2020). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Machin, D. (2007). *Introduction to multimodal analysis*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Mills, S. (2003). *Gender and Politeness* (Vol. 17). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The Extension of Man*. New York: Signet
- Price, S. (1998). *Media Studies*. (2nd edition). England: Longman
- Riji, H. M. (2006). Beauty or Health? A Personal View. *Malays Fam Physician*, 1(1), 42–44. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4797041/>
- Smith, P.M. (1985). *Language, the Sex and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Saeed, L. & Khan, S. I. (2022). Critical discourse analysis of language and visuals in beauty advertisements. *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, V(II), 37-43 [https://doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2022\(V-II\).04](https://doi.org/10.31703/gdpmr.2022(V-II).04)
- Wrong, D. H. (1979). *Power: its forms, bases, and uses*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Zawisza, M. (2019). *Advertising, gender, and society: A psychological perspective*. (1st edition). Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Advertising-Gender-and-Society-A-Psychological-Perspective/Zawisza-Riley/p/book/9781138501379>